

NSC DEBRIEFING

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29 MAY 1956

KHRUSHCHEV'S SECRET SPEECH

1. Since I last reported to the Council on the progress of the USSR's anti-Stalin campaign we have been able to obtain an authentic text of the opening blast of that campaign--Khrushchev's secret speech before the Party Congress. We have been comparing this authentic text with the avalanche of leaks, rumors and reports that had preceded it.

2. This is truly one of the most significant documents ever to come out of the Soviet Union, and the early reports of its contents reflect the actual text quite closely.

A. Let me give you some of its flavor--for example, in regard to Stalin's brutality and abuse of power. First, Khrushchev explains the technique of the purges.

(1) "When Stalin said that so-and-so should be arrested, it was necessary to accept on faith that he was an 'enemy of the people'. Meanwhile Beria's gang, which ruled in the organs of state security, outdid itself in providing the guilt of the arrested and the truth of materials which it falsified. And what proofs were offered? Confessions of the arrested, and the investigative judges

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accepted these 'confessions'. And how is it possible that a person confesses crime which he has not committed? Only in one way--because of application of physical methods of pressuring him, tortures, bringing him to the state of unconsciousness, deprivation of his judgement, taking away his human dignity. In this manner were 'confessions' acquired."

- (2) Discussing the number of victims of Stalin's wholesale murders, Khrushchev claimed:

"It was determined that of the 139 members and candidates of the Party's Central Committee who were elected at the 17th Congress [1934], 98 persons (i.e., 70%) were arrested and shot."

- (3) As for the Stalin purges in general:

"Now when the cases of some of these so-called 'spies' and 'saboteurs' were examined, it was found that all their cases were fabricated. Confessions of guilt of many arrested and charged with enemy activity were gained with the help of cruel and inhuman tortures. We must state, that after the war, the situation became even more complicated. Stalin became even more capricious, irritable and brutal; in particular his

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suspicion grew. His persecution mania reached unbelievable dimensions. Many workers were becoming enemies right before his eyes. After the war, Stalin separated himself from the collective even more. Everything was decided by him alone without any consideration for anyone and anything."

- (4) In regard to the trumped-up Doctors' Plot of 1953, Khrushchev quoted Stalin's warning to his secret police chief, Ignatiev ("If you do not obtain confessions from the doctors we will shorten you by a head!") and continued: "Stalin personally called the investigative judge, gave him instructions, advised him on which investigative methods should be used: those methods were simple - beat, beat and, once again, beat."

B. As rumored earlier, Khrushchev also blamed Stalin for failing to anticipate the Nazi invasion:

- (1) "Documents which have now been published show that by 3 April 1941, Churchill, through his ambassador to the USSR Cripps, personally warned Stalin that the Germans had begun rearranging their armed units with the intent of attacking the Soviet Union.....Churchill stressed this repeatedly in his dispatches of 18 April and

in those several days later. What is more, Stalin had ordered that no credence be given to the information of this sort, in order not to provoke the start of military operations."

(S) Further, Khrushchev blamed him for mismanagement of early operations:

"....the threatening danger which hung over our Fatherland in the first period of the war was largely due to the faulty methods of directing the nation and the party by Stalin himself."

3. Khrushchev also made several charges against Stalin which had not been reflected in earlier rumors. For instance, Khrushchev not only distributed copies of Lenin's "testament" to Congress delegates before delivering his secret speech, but also buttressed his charges further by reading letters written by Lenin and Lenin's wife about Stalin's behavior shortly before Lenin's death.

A. Thus Lenin to Stalin:

"You permitted yourself a rude summons of my wife to the telephone and a rude reprimand to her....I have no intention to forget so easily that which is being done against me, and I need not stress here that I consider as directed against me all that is being done against my wife. I ask you, therefore, that you weigh carefully whether you are agreeable

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to retract your words and apologizing or whether you prefer the severance of relations between us."

- B. Khrushchev suggested that the 1934 murder of Stalin's top lieutenant, Kirov, which touched off the purges, was actually committed by the secret police.
- C. Khrushchev reviewed what is now being done to straighten out the record of the purges:

"A great part of these cases are being reviewed now and a great part of them are being voided because they were baseless and falsified. Suffice it to say that, from 1934 to the present time, the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court had rehabilitated 7,679 persons, many of whom were rehabilitated posthumously."
4. Stalin's "wickedly suspiciousness" was illustrated by his attitude toward Marshal Zhukov. Khrushchev stated:
 - A. "Stalin was very much interested in the assessment of Comrade Zhukov as a military leader. He asked me often ~~for~~ my opinion of Zhukov. I told him then: 'I have known Zhukov for a long time; he is a good general and a good military leader.'"
 - B. "After the war Stalin began to tell all kinds of nonsense about Zhukov, among others the following: 'You praised Zhukov, but he does not deserve it. It is said that, before each operation at the front

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Zhukov used to behave as follows; he used to take a handful of earth, smell it and say: 'We can begin the attack,' or the opposite, - 'the planned operation cannot be carried out.'"

"I stated at that time:

'I do not know, Comrade Stalin, who invented this, but it is not true.'

It is possible that Stalin himself invented these things for the purpose of minimizing the role and military talents of Marshal Zhukov."

C. Discussing the break with Tito in 1948, Khrushchev charged: "It was a shameful role that Stalin played here. The Yugoslav Affair contained no problems which could not have been solved through Party discussions among comrades."

D. As examples of Stalin's increasing paranoia during his later years, Khrushchev cited the following:

(1) "Because of his extreme suspicion, Stalin toyed with the absurd and ridiculous suspicion that Voroshilov was an English agent.... A special tapping device was installed in his home to listen to what was said there."

(2) "Stalin evidently had plans to finish off the old members of the Politburo. He often stated that Politburo members should be replaced by new ones."

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(3) "It is not excluded that, had Stalin remained at the helm for another several months, comrades Molotov and Mikoyan would probably not have delivered any speeches at this Congress."

5. The secret speech also defined how much of Stalin's career will be relegated to his black period. Thus, on the credit side:

A. "It is known that Stalin, after Lenin's death, especially during the first years, actively fought for Leninism against the enemies of Leninist theory and against those who deviated.... The party... started on a great scale the work of Socialist industrialization of the country, agricultural collectivization and cultural revolution. At that time Stalin gained great popularity, sympathy and support. The party had to fight...Trotskyites, Zinovievites, rightists, and the bourgeois nationalists. This fight was indispensable."

B. And, on the debit: "Later, however, Stalin--abusing his power more and more--began to fight the eminent party and government leaders, and to use terrorist methods against honest Soviet people."

6. In addition to posthumous rehabilitation of the innocent, some of the other measures which the present regime is undertaking to correct the excesses and distortions of the Stalin era were also outlined in Khrushchev's speech.

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- A. Revision and fresh evaluation of many World War II military operations in order "to present them in their true light."
 - B. Revision of history, literature and the Arts to as to play down Stalin and, instead, play up Lenin, the party, and the people.
7. Not all of the juicy bits which were rumored to have been in the secret speech were actually there:
Among the missing--
- A. An alleged indictment of Stalin for the "brutality" with which he carried through the collectivization of agriculture during the late twenties and early thirties.
 - B. An alleged mention of the "unjustified" purge of Marshals Tukhachevsky and Blucher.
 - C. Stalin's alleged responsibility for the Katyn massacre.
 - D. Stalin's alleged murder of his second wife Alliluyeva.
 - E. Alleged charges that Stalin was guilty of violent nationalism and anti-semitism.
 - F. An alleged incident of Khrushchev's personal humiliation by Stalin--being forced to dance the "Gopak."
8. Speaking generally, this authentic text provides us with important clues and opens up new avenues for investigation of the Soviet political machine.

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- A. For example, the admission that Stalin was preparing to purge some of the older members of the Politburo shortly before his death helps to explain the vehemence with which the present leadership is attacking his memory.
- B. It also raises the question whether any of these living leaders had been assisting Stalin in this intrigue.
- C. Other insights can be gained from:
 - (1) Knowledge of Khrushchev's patronizing approach when discussing current leaders - especially Malenkov, Vasilovsky and Voroshilov - is of value in weighing the leadership question.
 - (2) Also noteworthy is Khrushchev's mention of only himself and Mikoyan as ever trying to stand up to Stalin.
 - (3) Khrushchev's gratuitous remarks in favor of Marshal Zhukov may be significant in defining Zhukov's standing within the hierarchy.
- D. Even the omissions from Khrushchev's speech are interesting--they may point to subjects on which the present leaders are particularly sensitive.
 - (1) Thus, there is a marked lack of criticism of Stalin's theoretical works, no mention of his "guilt" in regard to the Finnish War, and very little criticism of his treatment of the agricultural problem.

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9. All in all, Khrushchev has shattered the Stalin myth: only the early years of Stalin's long career are now worth mentioning, and even these are tainted by his break with Lenin.
- A. The present leaders hope to gain support for their own regime by comparing it with the tyranny of Stalin. They are trying to reinvigorate the party and capture the positive loyalty of the people.
- B. They realize that the over-centralization, maintained by terror, which developed under Stalin, is incompatible with the efficient functioning of the administrative apparatus. They also want to set up a barrier against the emergence of a new Stalin.
- C. At the same time, they have initiated what can become a dangerous chain reaction. They have confounded their precious Marxist theory and have cast suspicion on their own actions during the Stalin period. In the long run, therefore, the campaign may produce results they neither anticipate nor desire.

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